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WAYS OF VERSE

WAYS OF VERSE
BY ARTHUR LEWIS

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TO
W. H. L.
'...frater, ave atque vale.'

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ONE HUNDRED COPIES ONLY OF THIS ISSUE

MENS SANA

His walk is with the morning,and the dew,
Alone,his early feet do tread it through;
And their track is far behind them in the veil
Spread of frosted airs all o'er the meadows pale;
And he looks upon the vapours as they rise
From the hollows of the lowlands,and his eyes,
They sight the dripping glitter of the leaves,
The spangle of the webwork that he weaves,
The spider,o'er the quickset and the brake.
And from his coolest couch he does awake
The lark to the first earnest of his song,
Never after quite so gladsome and so strong.
And he scares the little black brood of the mere
To the thicket-marge,as draws his step a-near;
And the rookery gives voice above his head
As also well to leave its airy bed;
And he hears the heavy breathing of the kine
Where they lie full-fed upon the green incline,
Heavy-eyed,of each,the thick neck,it is bowed,
And their breath is all about them as a cloud.
And he hears the stealing rustle in the grass
By the hedgerow,as the weasel,he would pass
From his stealthy toil to safer depths away
Through the coppice in the quest of other prey:

And the sharp call of the game-bird,when the fox
Hasteth home with lolling tongue,as if he mocks
Pride of plumage,but a vain thing to the fangs.
And the ruddy fruit,a moment more,it hangs,
Then it falleth for his ear upon the green,
Where the mushroom,in its sweetness,it is seen;
And he stoopeth to take harvest of them both.
And to turn him to the hearthside is he loth,
Though the blue smoke,straight and sluggish,
now he spies,
And the hunger of the strong man does arise,
With a love for all the kindness that is there,
So good is all about him,and so fair.
But he bears it all within him,ne'ertheless,
For he knoweth nothing better that should bless
And freshen all the issues of the day,
Fall as frowning and as evil as they may:
Howsoever he be fretted or be worn,
Ne'er forgets he the good gospel of the morn.

Thus it is he goes abroad,and with a smile,
Through the thick press of the evil and the vile:
And a cool air plays for ever on his brow
As he bends him to his burden,and enow
Is a knowledge of a fitness for the task,
Without a fore or afterword to ask,
As whoso had forever in his gaze
The beginning and the meaning of his days;
For his ears the mighty line that ran along
And chanted the first purpose of the song,
Ere the Minstrel,the Immortal,he could let
The music of his theme be all beset
By the voices of the vulgar and the vain,

By the mumblings of the sluggard overlain,
And the whisperings of the futile and the weak,
And of them who ever ask and never seek;
And of them who ever shout Him to the skies,
Yet from His wonderwork do turn their eyes
To cringe upon the footstool of the night
With vision ever fearful of the light.
And at even, when the sun is off the lea,
And the wood is less alive with melody,
And the fish begin to leap above the ford,
While the shadows, they grow long upon the sward,
And the moth comes all a flutter to the flower,
And a stillness stealeth onward with the hour,
'Tis then again he looketh where he would
On that chapter of the evil and the good,
One of many, none alike, and none in vain,
Though the writ be all a-blur with sin and pain,
Though the phrasing be all foolish and awry.
For he reads therein what is not to the eye;
And he figures many fancies all unsaid,
Throwing back again in gratitude his head
As he shutteth to the volume, and in peace
Seeks in slumber the brief blessing of release
From a labour of the loving and the true
To render thee, O Earth, thy better due,
Happy Mother, as thou art, but of the few!

LONG AGO

A Lad lay on the rounding
Of the green ridge of a hill;

And wide and all abounding
What did his vision fill;
Though poor had been his eating,
And ragged was his smock,
And life were but the bleating,
The shifting of his flock.

For there below the bending
Of yonder narrow path
The white smoke was upwending
From the cottage in the garth;
And there beyond the reaching
Of yonder valley far
The blue sea and the beaching,
The breaking of the bar.

And the strong sun, he was doffing
His cloud-cap of the morn,
Where, away there in the offing,
The fisher fleet was borne:
And the grey gull, he was wheeling,
And his slow wing did he lave
Where, through the low sand stealing,
The runlet found the wave.

But there came a stranger scaling
That hill with eager feet;
And the dreaming lad, ere hailing,
With a good look did he greet.
And words prophetic, scopeful,
Were his, more than enow,
Of the boy's eyes, black and hopeful,
And the brave breadth of his brow.

So that now no eyes are older
In the knowledge of the strong;
And nowhere is brow aught bolder
To face this life along:
And by none a readier payment,
Another's pride to mock,
Than him who once,his raiment,
Was a sheep-boy's ragged smock.

Yet his look is ever wistful
For what it may not meet;
And his ears are ever listful,
But the lambs,they never bleat;
And the sun is never shining,
And the ships,they never go,
As for one,a boy reclining
On a green hill long ago.

BE THOU TO ME

Be thou to me as unto day's awaiting
Through rainfall hours of sadness,chill and drear,
Cometh,at touch of eve,a calm abating,—
Light i' the West,and gladness again near.

Be thou to me as unto unavailing,
Night-long, refuse of thought's all sick allure,
Cometh,at creep of dawn's first tender paling,
Dream i' the last,and slumber sweet and pure.

THE RESPONSE

Then drew the TEMPTER nearer to that bed
Whereon the WORKER lay, and thus he said:—

'Be obstinate no more: own it is plain,
Thine is the path of loss, and mine of gain.
What else?—the way of sweetness is the mouth:
The breath of love is balmiest i' the South;
Where wouldest thou but wend thee with the sun,
Thy long-mocked heritage were well begun
With langour of thy neck upon her knees,
Thy look without that arbour, where the bees,
The gilded rout of winged things to and fro
In honeyed industry do come and go:
Or where the swallows course their skimming flight;
Where yellow fruit outdoes the yellow light;
Where peeping forms of fawn and nymph confess
The kindly screen of bayleaf and cypress:
Or where the cool spray palters with the blaze
Of noonbeams, as it were, in mad amaze
To find itself uplifted to such joy,
Scarce witting how its wild way to employ.
And there the hours shall pass thee without count
And measure of their purpose and amount;
Nor through the vine-leaves shall one blinking bar
Of western glory thy good pleasure mar,
And warn thee of the night, for what were that
But word of what the stars would soon look at,
Such daylongs are in purchase of thy will:
In them the cup is brimmed thou wouldest spill
With gazing elsewhere toward the gadding clouds,
In that vain aspiration which enshrouds

With words the actualities, with thought
The sweet simplicities good flesh has taught.
Then such at length abjure, and come about,
And be no more of men who think and doubt.'

Another step the TEMPTER neared that head
The WORKER tossed, and this again he said:—
'For what avails thee, o' this other hand?
What of thy good completing, is it scanned
By other eye than thy creative pride?
Which is a praise a little less than wide.
I tell thee, man, as owns e'en thy conceit,
Ne'er in thy spell of days shalt thou e'er meet
That heart applause far worthier and more loud
Than all the throaty rantings of the crowd,
Who fawn upon the fashion of the hour,
And are so prompt fool-promptings to devour.
No: to the grave thou comest with thy kind,
When all thy fretted thought is left behind,
Perchance to moulder with unmindful years,
By cause of that decree which breath prefers
To whatsoever leavings of the dead:
Or should somewhere an honouring phrase be said,
Which springs thy merit to the gaze of all,
What that to thee, then sped beyond recall?—
Where to, ye know not,—to what world beyond:
Which, of a truth, could know nought of the fond
And purblind steps of this poor life-approach:
Of that be well assured. And did encroach
My speech yet further on a theme so droll
As this, the cogitations of a soul
Bereft of this sweet flesh, I would expose
How little worth its bliss these present throes.

Ha! then enough; I see good counsel clings!
Thou smilest? Now the clipping of those wings
Which would have borne thee from the pleasant earth
To where but winds and vapours have their birth,
And irresponsive airs about thee lie.
Why toil all unacclaimed, and — toiling — die?'

Then cried the WORKER:—'There the reason why!'

COME AWAY!

Go no more by yonder steep:
'Tis a thing too black and deep:
'Tis a tempter strong and vile,
Would await thee with a smile;
Would but lift another span,
Boastful of the blood of man
Spattered on its barren side:
Horrid rite — inhuman pride!
Come away — come away ——
Come away — O come away!

Look no more on yonder eyes:
'Twere a deed too little wise.
'Tis a witchcraft there within;
Wild bewilderment of sin.
Should a soul there pass afar,
It would wander without star,
Without worship, without rest,
Without word of honour blest.
Come away — come away——
Come away — O come away!

SURVIVAL EVER

WHAT if with irremediable forecast
Hath death decreed the paling of that face,
The enfeebling of that form, its pleasure passed;
And for the tomb its all too tender grace:
    While to that touch
    Of hand, O such
A failing ever, ever, till the last:—

Not, then, for me that verdict of despair
Which may be met but with a shuddering wail;
For I will see thee live in all things fair;
And for the wistful view shall never fail
    The rendering how
    Of lip and brow,
The course and mystery of that gathered hair.

And I will find the likeness of thy smile
Allwhere in sunlit flicker of green trees;
And thy dear voice this ear shall yet beguile
In every lisp and whisper of the breeze:
    Those eyes I'll mark
    In any dark
Grove-shadow, deep, where mine to watch awhile.

And all the silent intercourse to be
With rock or stream, grey moor or mossy fell,
And desert shore by lone, untravelled, sea,
Shall of thy life things so delighted tell,
    That thus, O sure
    As doth endure
Fair Earth, be thou immortal unto me!

COQUETTE

SERVE thee well those darting eyes:
Let that dimpled cheek devise
Access to the shallow mood
That of thee is understood:
How it may not look away
From that pose and posture gay,
Wooing, winning all there be
In the shape God gave to thee;
All the longing I must know
For the form does,tripping,go
As were earth the fitting walk
Of a courtship without baulk;
As were love the simple theme
Of an idle,flippant,dream;
Whispering word and pressing hand
Reason tricked, and passion fanned;
Thine a conquest slyly scanned,
Mine a manhood half unmanned.

But I know another good
Somewhere wrapped in womanhood:
'Tis a thing in life and line,
Lip and brow, as sweet as thine;
Though it scarce would seem to guess
What its gift of loveliness,
Nor to grasp what stuff it be,
Clad in that simplicity
Which of innocence is heir;
With a shade of sadness there,
And of reticence forlorn,
As unwitting where were borne
Strange felicities of thought,

Winged with love, and only caught
In the corners of the mind
With blush, then left behind.
But I know that could I touch—
Were in fate a favour such—
Clutch and hold that spirit pure
For a space, ne'er could endure
Eyes of mine to meet again
Sparkle of these others vain;
Never might this shallow mood
That of thee is understood
Serve thee well; and never should
Thing, as thou, by me be wooed!

SAD O' THE SUN

MOTHER
O true, my child, 'tis summer, sweet with ease,
Again that's here. But never can it please
My heart, as yours.
DAUGHTER
O Mother! still endures
This saddest state?
MOTHER
Which is the will of fate!
DAUGHTER
But wherefore? — why?
MOTHER
Should I at last reply

My words about your life, as mine, were weight.
DAUGHTER
How can that be!
MOTHER
Dear girl, felicity
Is fragile as yon gauzy petalled flower
That droops upon the least unfeeling hour,
Or bluff touch of the wind.
DAUGHTER
O call to mind
My father's thought, that we should ever cloak
Our good with grace more as yon might of oak!
MOTHER
So true it is, then, I should hate this air
Which letteth bloom things all too frail and fair.
He loathed it too.
DAUGHTER
But he was stern,— while you—
MOTHER
On such day as this your father slew.
DAUGHTER
O Mother! what a word!
MOTHER
Shall still deferred,
O Wrong! be thy narration?
DAUGHTER
What— O what
Is this you murmur? O of too long grief begot
Is this vague self-accusing! Such remorse,
Conjured of jarring trifles, keens our loss.
My father died of sickness all men know
To snatch the breath alike of high and low

Who suck its poison in.

MOTHER

Which was — my sin!
Shall I now speak?

DAUGHTER

Yes, Mother, do — begin!

MOTHER

'Twas such a summer's first of light and flower,
And I a three month's bride, when in this bower
He touched his lips to mine, and left me lone
Once more, for his good labours; though did own
My heart, alas! not half the grudging thought
Of absence, his, that to this face I brought.
Such friendship as was mine,—it is a thing
Which gives and takes, but never does it cling—
And here was all this scene before my eyes;
And in my lap a little volume lies
That I would read, one that he gave to me,
At my request, though could I not but see
His soul's scorn of the sweetness of that verse
I' the gracious smile that would his lips unpurse:
Which made me clutch it firmer to this palm,
And now did ope it in delicious calm
'Neath this green, arboured, draping, for a while
To live with them on that Ionian isle,
Those two, for whom sufficed its silence fair,
So love-sweet were its depths of sea and air.
And thereof did I read some space unknown,
All timeless were the word-winged moments flown;
And if I raised mine eyes at length to look
At all which lay without this dreaming nook,
That lawn, the humming blaze of honied flowers,
Of rose and bell, and trellicing that embowers

Yon hive-row from the sun; or where beyond
Lies under lilied face the little pond;
And thickest swath is ripening to the seed
O'er all the air-stirred slumber of that mead;
'Twas but with inward vision that I gazed,
So with all fancy was the present hazed
And overcome, until this wakening ear
Caught hint of footstep that drew gently near;
At which, this hand upwent, this breath was short,
And there once more the love I had outfought!

DAUGHTER

Ah, Mother! as I guessed!

MOTHER

It stood confessed,
I fear, as ever, in my look: else had he not,
In honour, stayed him longer on that spot
In absence of his friend, to whom I knew
Had been his prayer, as mine, to stand all true.
But ah! that rapture which was o'er my soul!
Magnetic sight! it drew, and in he stole;
And to this seat beside me did he fall,
And ours were words of which love is the all:
Though with a converse scholarlike we clad
The thought alway too tremulous we had
Within our inmost beings, in our eyes,—
O there it is herself truth ne'er denies!
And as some word of classic worth was said
The nearer drew to mine the speaker's head;
And as my lesser store his own equips
With luscious phrase, I feel the pressing lips,
As 'twere, already feeding these with breath
Against their promise of poetic death:
Until, indeed, a touch! and speech no more;

But life and love alone was all they bore;
And thought and memory,both alike,were o'er!
DAUGHTER
O Mother! but a kiss!
MOTHER
But that. Yet this,
The knell and end of two poor mortals' bliss!
DAUGHTER
Ah, so! I see.
MOTHER
He stood there; and on me
His gaze was set: it scowled not at the wrong
That other shared, as though he knew too strong
Love must have been for honour in that will
Of onetime friend, for whom was friendship still:
But waved his hand, and with a forced smile,
Forbade the words of shame that self revile;
And ever just, in judgement of the wise,
Your father, so alone for me his eyes
Of sorrow, not of wrath, as though they saw,
At length, unblinded, all that lay before;
And caught the spirit chains that held me to
His gaoler-love, to flinch whene'er he drew
Me nearer to the prison of his heart,
Howe'er I smiled endurance of the smart.
The which was henceforth all our way of life;
Though ever to deny it was the strife,
Unending,of our effort, each for each:
As alway with fond look would we impeach
The hapless meaning of that summer's morn,
When was faith's holiest wear too sadly torn,
And had a rent forever that might ne'er
The deftest industry quite all repair:

Till that dread ill beset him, and I know
It was a fate he little would forego,
And welcomed with the best, for all that he
Spoke ever of the life yet his to be,
And planned an honoured age, lest I should guess
Some trifle of his true life weariness:
And of his vision still of jingling chain
Which, from his wrist to mine, made all love vain:
A spectre-presence, solely such a weal
Of summer soft, as this, did first reveal,
When, dreaming richest things, I fell as one
Drunk with the spellful lustre of the sun;
And lost the look of earth in subtle ways
Of mote-like fancy, tossing in the rays
Of yonder kindling, bloom-unfolding, blaze,
For me, not ever friend!

DAUGHTER

Ah, God forfend!

INTIMATION

FORGIVE me, love, if but a failing thought,
A hazed imagination, made thee mine;
Through groping years and blindfold ever brought
Where alway for some Presence must I pine,
No gift of insight wholly could define.

But this believe, that intimation true
Of that strange Something-More not yet espied
Was never wanting to the fairest view:
However well with all foregone it vied,
Yet was an absence vague for which I sighed.

The freshest morn that e'er uplifted crown
Of glory o'er yon grove-enguarded,crest;
The richest eve that ever slumbered down
To roseate silence in the dreamful West,
Ne'er had my heart of thanks quite all confessed.

No symphony of so delirious touch
The very stones would quiver and be flesh,
But of its uttermost did leave me such
Whose life yet slips the capture of its mesh,
And I must hearken to some note afresh.

No deep emotion of the meeting eyes,
No languor of the eyelash and the hair,
Fondling the gentle cheek, but truth denies
To love her pure perfection even there:
It was a thing for seeking yet elsewhere.

Thus of unrest was I sped ever on
Through one pursuit unspeakable of thee,
As though thy spirit-self were that did con
Alike what would my better portion be:
Soul of mine own! 'twas that delivered me!

PERVERT

He tasted onetime of forbidden fruit,
And knows not since if 'twere all sweet or gall;
But this alone:— none now will ever suit:
No other fruit has any taste at all.

MOTHER AND CHILD

PALE was she as lily bloom,
Now for life and now for death;
But her eyes did search the room:
Came this whisper to her breath:—
'I am mother — that am I:
Wherefore have ye ta'en my son?
Bring him quick, that he may lie
Here by me, and we be one.'

But they knew not what should be
Their reply, as round they stood,
Mute and fearful, until he
Spoke, the strong man, wise and good.
'Bring him—bring him. I no more
Do withstand ye with a 'no.'
Well or ill, my work is o'er:
Let the hot tears fill and flow.'

So they bore him to her touch,
Little thing that ne'er had breath.
White her fingers, they did clutch—
O for life! — and O for death!
For a moment they did glow,
Her sweet eyes, on him, her son;
Then, the next, the truth they know;
And again those two are one!

THE HERO

His name was great on every tongue;
By every throat his work was sung:
His right, the rule of every heart;
His aim, for each soul set apart:
And that he braved, and that he freed,
But that for which they too would bleed.

And dear the speech his lips had spelt;
And dear the land where he had dwelt,
Green steep and pine, and height of snow;
Clear lake and stream that lie below:
They scarce could hold their honest vaunt,
'Twas this their hero's eyes did haunt.

But on a day the rumour ran
Of what had writ a learned man,
All bald of brow, with snuffy clothes,
And glasses great upon his nose;
Who said, alas! his searching ne'er
Through mighty tomes the truth could spare.

Their brave man was but thing of fame,
A baseless fiction, with a name,
By forbears fond in days of old,
With other fireside fables told;
And 'twas a thing amusing much,
To find him hailed a hero, such.

Then o'er that land a shadow passed,
And grave was every feature cast:
'Twas something of the spirit fled

From that good clime which left it dead.
No mighty peak, nor grassy vale,
But there the sun shone sick and pale.

Till one arose, and thus he cried:—
'Grant, if they will, we be belied
In his true self, O that were what
To them — to us, by whom begot,
In his great name, the best that we
For now — for aye — will ever be?'

So 'tis again the land is glad;
And true is what — as truth it had
In blood and bone — the soul, it knows
To be the surest of its throes:
And man, the maker of his creed
In freedom, maketh him who freed.

SOUL'S AWAKENING

How with a flash, a fleck of thought,
The wave, as of a wizard-hand,
Am I to spheres of feeling wrought,
Rare aspirations rich and grand,
I never dreamt — I know not why —
Were in the reach of such as I!

What was the word that did invoke—?
But seek not for the flitting cause.
A start! a gasp! this sight awoke!
This breath another ether draws!

And swiftly to the fixed ear
Do novel voicings whisper near.

And in the wonder of the sun
On herb and bank, o'er hill and lea;
Blest rumour of good things begun,
For endings blessed and to be;
In heart of earth, or sad or gay,
Am I participate for aye!

IDENTITY.

Am I the man who had a will
To snatch a joy a year ago?
Am I the one who took his fill
Of sorrow sick one drear ago?

Am I the youth who wandered on
With thought adrift a lone ago?
The lad whose wonderment did con
Things new to that unknown ago?

Why, there the thing that I would know!
New bark is bound about the tree.
Quite other buds, they push and grow,
Nor with the years foregone agree.

The seed-winds course about the globe,
Germ-laden, unto many lands;
In strange habiliment they robe
And liken the remoter strands:

And men and nations gaze,aghast,
On grim beginnings,storied,old;
And feel no portion in the past,
And doubt if all be truly told.

With them am I: in head and limb,
And voice, they hail me for the same;
But answer none to wonder dim
Why to this other shore I came:

And am transmuted to pursuit
Of vistas and horizons far,
To view the lustre of new fruit,
The white light upon reef and bar:

And stand a witness to design,
Creative, noway could it know,
That self they tell me once was mine
Within the long forgot ago.

IN HERMITAGE

Ha! little wife! come hither — here the grot!
Found have we,then,at last,the very spot
Where went his days:
Here, on this rugged hillside's farthest slope,
Beyond, above, communion's common hope,
Earth's meeting ways!

In let us pass, and, hand in hand, create
Imagination's ownership of fate,

Strange as was this;
Here, in this cavern-chamber, still and lone,
Assume the slow hours melancholic flown,
With those of bliss:

Recall — ah, wife! — but with what help we may
Of separation likewise — stand away —
Loose we our touch:
So, so — recall how he sat here beside
His simple board; and lovingly he eyed
His wealth, as such:

His bench, his pallet-bed, his maple-bowl;
His gourd, his book, his meditative scroll,
His hour-glass sure;
Perchance, also twofold of sandal-shoon,
Some reverent gift of which the sinful boon
He must endure:

And gazed upon the cool and screened light
At that dark portal, cheerful, sweet and white,
From whence the stir
Of leaves and bird-voices and soughing airs;
And all that through the summer aether fares
With winged birr:

And caught, maybe, where horse or foot were borne
Far down, there, in the valley, trill of horn;
Ay, e'en a call;
And knew the world was working as of old,
Ere did an impulse sad his self off-fold
For good and all.

That world from which henceforth he nothing took
Save for the chance that led them to his nook,
Wayfarers worn,
With hunger of the blood or of the mind,
Questing some consolation, far to find,
And hither borne,

To share his peace a daylong, and his bread;
To drain his bowl and stretch them to his bed;
And on their knees,
With morn, receive his blessing and his prayer,
And, worhipful, with thanks, ere on they fare,
His goodness please.

So did he live withdrawn from anxious lot.
And we are here, O wife, when he is not,
To wonder why,
If his, so gracious hap, must we regard
And deem it somewhat of a durance hard,
Both you and I.

Why look we, mute, into each other's eyes,
As though were here event of strong surprise,
This life all lone;
As 'twere not ours also, in gift of birth,
Single and sole, — ah, love, forgive! — on earth
To be outthrown?

Say what we will: — nay, look not so forlorn!
The thought will come: of speech shall it be shorn,
For thee to lose,
All unparticipate; when ne'er, we swore,
Should, each from each, be screened any more

Our flitting clues?

'Twere but to say that hermitage is ours,
Be what the intent confessional of hours
Of union supreme;
Be what the love we tender, there be caves
Wherein our inmost dwelleth, and behaves
Not as would seem;

But is celled up for ever. So — be so
For us, with him, this fellowship to know:
In honour, cast
This untruth of amazement; never start,
As if in life so strange we had no part,
With look aghast.

For us, with him, then be more precious, sweet,
When often from that solitude we greet
Wayfaring thought;
And in the broken silence of the soul
Be we, in breaking bread, in quaffing bowl,
By him thus taught:—

If isolation, ours, — and though we mix
Our breath betimes, speech faileth oft to fix
Much seen of one —
The thing is well, else were there this to fear,—
Noway apart, then no time drawing near,
Love's best undone!

O HEART OF MAN!

His castle walls rise still and sheer
Above the wide and rolling plain
His young look wandereth far and near:
It wandereth far and back again.

And never roof, that happy broad,
Nor point, nor pinnacle before
His boy's eyes, but doth call him lord;
Yet would he long for something more.

He knoweth nowise what it be;
But to his breath there comes a sigh.
O heart of man! for ever free!
Not land nor lordship thee can buy!

PASTOR FIDELIS

'Young friend, the stooping gait, the rusty coat
Of him we have just passed, when broke a note,
Methought, of jest in voice of yours at such
A careless shape,—could I but add a touch
To that aspect, then might a little blush
Of shame be added to that youthful flush.
So— so: enough. 'Twas meant in all good part:
Then give an ear, and straightway will I start.
Some halfhour ere we reach yon village hill:
Will well my little tale the meantime fill'

'A dozen years are past since did appear

That face of his, first 'mong these good folk here;
And who should call them other? Virtues theirs
By which all Christians compass their affairs,
Who murder not, and rob not,—nor do lie,
Beyond the least that we do, you or I:
Feared God in sickness, praised they Him in health,
And broke of His commandments but the twelth.
An honest folk: yet never fell it so
That honesty did peace so little know:
That airs idyllic, these, for purest life,
Were e'er so full of faction and of strife.
That is, you'll understand, the thing is spoke
Of them we're wont to call the better folk.
The baser—well, I think they scarcely knew
What way was theirs to follow or to do;
With them who worshipped this way or else that,
As did the parson, or withstood him flat.
Two camps opposing thus, which, split apart
And filled the thoughts of all with bickering smart;
When death of his was but for both a loss
That left them glowering the grave across.
And then came his successor, yonder man.
He was of Oxenford; his life a span
Of peaceful, cloistered, study, till that day
He did a waking conscience straight obey;
Which told him that his cloth for work was meant
Elsewhere, and was in booklore much misspent.
So to the good chance of this cure he rose;
And hither came, and stepped betwixt those foes:
That is to say, they stood on either hand.
But ne'er, it seemed, was't his to understand
Such penible divisions of his flock
That would of christian ministry make mock.

He would not be enlightened of such strife,
But closed his ears, and went his way of life:
Which was the simple work of spreading love,
And teaching how it was taught from above.
By which means — strange it is to have to tell —
Between the blessing of both ranks he fell,
Befriended not of either, lukewarm named;
By no lip praised, who by no lip was blamed.
'Twas then the wicked thing arose and smote,
The villany devised by woman's throat,
That which I shrink from telling.'
Could it be
That such a slander fell on such as he!—
That some there were believed it; some who said,
Well, it was ugly, and if one shook one's head,
'Twas all there was to do; while, for the rest,
A charitable negation was the best
That they could tender of a deed unproved
'Gainst one to whom their reverence behooved.
And there the matter stood: and, meanwhile, she,
The accuser, with her shame thought fit to flee:
That is, she disappeared; and there were those
Who put what meaning to the fact they chose.
And what of him, the sufferer? Well you ask.
He simply went, as ever, to his task
Of succour and of service, though his face,
His smile, could hide of torture not the trace!—
Who felt all, even the friendliest, flinch and fling
A doubting glance that did, as harshest, sting.
And greyer grew the hair upon his brow,
And did his back a little deeper bow,
And did his garb grow further yet from spruce
Than had been ever its too careless use.

But, for the rest, he went about his work;
Which never now, if ever, his to shirk;
Much less, — as was suggested of the worst —
That he, as she, should fly this spot accurst.
(Which flight, his worldly means him well allowed)
Was he to bring this shame on that he vowed
To strive for and obey, his church? not he!
Let be the world, its malice; and let be
The uncharity of tongues: 'fore God alone
He would go on, and never offer moan!'

'Thus lived he down in those five years that came
Thereafter, slowly, wearily, that shame;
And won his pardon kind of even those
Who had refused their verdict aught to gloze:
And of most others gained a pitying love
Whose grace would be the bad past all above.
And in such mercy was a union found
As ne'er before the good folk here had bound;
Who, with regarding this one troubled lot,
So well redeemed, old rivalries forgot;
And grew a christian brotherhood as much
As on imperfect earth were ever such:
And he, the sign and symbol of their peace:
When, hereupon, my story well might cease.'

'But fell a discourse, his, one Holy Day —
How clearly I remind me of the way,
How feeling-fraught, came from his lips the text,
'Thinketh no evil' — how his words, they vext,
I take it, there some consciences, a few
Who once had thought all evil were his due!
And how to eyes of others tears arose,

As did they catch too keen a hint of throes
Must once have been the speaker's, when were they
Inclined also that word to disobey,
Of the Apostle, he who saw the heart
Of Christ, His teaching, all else put apart.
And through the church-door, wide, did never light
Of summer's morn break in on such a sight
Of faces that were fixed upon his own,
With what contrition could do to atone:
When came a cry behind us: all looked round;
And there was that from which the thrilling sound!
She stood there, in the entrance, wan and worn;
Clad but in rags, most wretched and forlorn
Of human things; and, trembling, were upraised
Her thin hands, clasped; with famished eyes she gazed
Upon the preacher; uttering once again
That shuddering cry: a wail it rose to when
The worthy sexton, starting from his nook,
To expel the rude intruder undertook.
Then from the pulpit came this ringing call:—
'I come!' and from his place, amazèd all
Saw him descend, and walk adown the aisle;
When was there one among us still so vile
To doubt a moment that divinest smile
Upon his lighted face? I know not, I:
But evil thought is ill thing to make die.
Yet not for long was now its wicked shrift,
When at his knees she fell, who would uplift
And spare her this remorse, that passionate speech,
Till that his voice each hearkener thus did reach;—
'Forgiveness, child, is thine of God, not me,
Who have received but blessing, this, of thee,
To find upon the threshold of my care

For these,my people, how that I must fare
A little roughly, seeking their esteem;
Which, won thus hardly, now will ever seem
A thousandfold more precious than had I
Received it as a gift.' Such his reply:
And ne'er among us one unhazèd eye. '

' There ends my tale at last; nor need I add
What loving succour, hers, that poor thing,sad:
Though naught availed: she lies o'er yonder wall,
Where springs through bowering elms the steeple tall.
But here our village-green! the yews are cool,
There,in its midst; the children 'scape from school,
Now, at this very hour; good folk at ease
Stand at their doors,— the baser, if you please
To call them so: the better?— well, I hear
From yonder garden cries of merry cheer,
Where your young friends await you, and your knack
Of happy sport, my boy, shall soon no lack
Of satisfaction, that believe me, find.
But ere we enter, just one glance behind;
For there, methinks, the stooping form of one
We have somewhile discoursed of, 'neath the sun
Of eventide, comes back, where, be he dressed
In rusty coat, his faith is all confessed.

THE PROPHET

They watched him with a frowning eye
When,first,a wondrous child was he:
His father's shrug, his mother's sigh,

But ill acclaimed the mystery.

How came they by this thing so strange,
This offspring so distempered, fraught
With thought and speech of such a range
Good honest folk had never sought?

They nowise knew: — but ill at ease
Within the circle of their love,
In vain his sweetness, would it please;
It seemed a gift so far above

What were to one of them but meet;
Their pleasant sins it set a-smart:
They could but count it a conceit,
To put him from his blood apart.

When, as men muttered round about
With pursèd lips and views askance,
He yet would speak his purpose out,
And turn aloft his stilling glance;

And grow with stature of the soul,
And beauty of the blest, to be
The preacher of some utter goal,
As yet his hearers cannot see:

But feel unhappily the fear
Of insight other than their own:
The word of yet another seer,
Enwrapped in so sublime a tone:

And hail him with their giddy praise,

And strew the way, his honour sung;—
Yet with a brief shift of the days
To fling him from their midst, among;

And shriek, and stone him to the name
Of one who, worst of teachers, taught
Their manhood, theirs, to be but shame;
Their fame to be a thing of naught:

And leave his blood upon the rock,
His bones upon the barren way,
Untombed for ever to the mock
Of screeds that ne'er shall know their day

While meat and drink is theirs, and men
Shall crush the grape and scratch the sod,
And gather comfort i' the ken
Of him, the comfort-giving God.

GETHSEMANE

Late is the hour and long hath been the day:
Much hath it seen that shall forever stay
Fixed in our hearts, words beauteous to obey;
And with that smile
Shall ever haunt us;—ah! High God defend
Lest we forget that face — lest, in the end,
Our watch at fault, though to this speech we bend:—
'Rest ye awhile.'

Somewhere, somewhat, he prayeth; that be sure.

Saw we not sweat upon that forehead pure!
There be some dread at hand may not endure
His spirit brave?
Were there not words of omen, never such
Did us, and all, with chill fear start and touch?
What if the miracle be overmuch,
Himself to save?—

What if Messiah's work be but proclaimed
In goodness to one's neighbour, life unblamed,
And this sweet love;
Which is a thing one asketh not in vain;
Which giveth; and demandeth not again,
Selfhood above!

That all! — and we, the followers of no force
Endowed to prompt change of earth's evil course:
And bring the world to that one worthy source
Of God, his Word;
Whereby prophetic fame not ours, in view
Of nations, we the chosen and the few;
But ours to preach him bearer of this new
Thing all unheard!

So doth it seem. But, ne'ertheless, not death —
No, never!— shamefully shall stay the breath
Of one so great. That phrase in which he saith
Ill of this night,
We know it for the sorrow whch will bring
The proof of what were too distressful thing,
When of our number, one, his soul would wring,
Unnatured quite.

No, rather, shall a wonderment awake
Him, the betrayer, his, to stand and quake,
And to the Master one obeisance make,
His mercy crave,
Who hath done mightier things than lay them low,
A thousand, without wield of sword, or blow;
Who taught the grave to open and upthrow,
Who stilled the wave.

What should we fear? If prays he there apart,
'Tis but to bear the soul's embittered smart.
His flesh, that shall he save with wondrous art,
And with that smile.
Late upon daylong is the hour, and to the close
Comes soon the fond prevailing of our foes:
We watch o'er One who naught of danger knows:
Sleep we awhile.

A DEATH AMONG THE VILLAGERS

They met him oft upon their ways:
With them he spent life's ending span;
Though nothing knew their rustic praise,
Save that he was a gentle man:

Till on a day the tidings spread
For whom was heard that passing bell;
And fell an honour for the dead
That for the living ne'er befell:

As from the farthest of the land,

To that still spot the many came,
And round his rest all, reverent, stand,
And strew his earth's immortal fame.

And word is quick to utter how
That simple form they daily saw
Was that to which they ne'er shall bow,
As was its due, not ever more.

Then mute amaze is theirs awhile,
Till slow reproach breaks into speech:
And each is mindful of his smile,
And well his voice recalleth each,

As when their way with his did cross
At fresh of dawn, or still of eve:
And now not one but is at loss
To tell the charm he did receive

From such exchange of glance with glance,
The scant salute of head and word;
And 'tis a webwork of romance
They soon shall trace where'er he stirred:

When, with the sweet warmth of the day,
Some maid espied him by the brook,
As in the willow's shade he lay,
And for the stream his fixèd look:

When, with the red west of the sun,
Some hind, home-coming through the glade,
Uplooked, and lo! there wandered one
Whose gait was strange, and often stayed:

When i' the still and starlit dark
They bade adieu, some tender twain;
Nigh were their lips, when O but — hark!
Some pensive pace! — 'tis his again!

FIASCO

O truth it is He made us one,
The maker, He, of man and maid:
A moment, and His will was done.
'Tis wisely wrought 'was what He said.
But thou art thing of noble birth;
And I am but of low degree.
His work is thus of little worth,
All-nigh is naught for thee and me.

He fashioned as when first He would
His imaged self for Earth devise;
And two in love together stood,
To walk the ways of Paradise.
But thou art thing of noble birth;
And I am but of low degree.
His work is now of nothing worth,
Nor is it aught for thee and me!

LIGHT OF LOVE

I passed her on the laughing math
Of summer lawns, where white the path,

The little footway to the sea;
And in that track but two were we.
I passed her; but my head would turn
To meet her eyes, and feel them burn
Their armèd beauty through the wear
Of thinner rigour then I bare.
And thus it was I stood agape,
And watched, a worshipper, the shape,
The head, the hip, the tripping pace,
The perjured plenitude of grace:
And loth was I to look my last,
Such charm was o'er my spirit cast
By that lithe form, ne'er did endure
My mind to murmur name impure.
No less a presence hers did seem
Than did of old the mythic dream
Invoke in lines of supple mould,
A thing of flesh, yet sovran-souled
To stir the veins of sluggard man
To current strong, the vision fan
Of love and love's desert, and all
The marvel doth that name befall
Since first she started from the sea,
Divine Anadyomene.

'O blood of man! thy red is wrought
To fetch on earth a vigour fraught
With fancies, adorations, strange,
Beyond the pitch of brutish range:
To fill the spring with laughing charms,
To cleave the copse with naked arms,
To crush the crocus in the grass
With skipping feet that gaily pass,

To let white shoulders give the mock
To blanchèd face of arid rock,
Or through the greenwood thicket call
Some note of nymph-sung madrigal.
O blood of man! why should it blench,
And of its best the spirit quench,
That would enliven all pursuit
Of human end with pleasant fruit
Of bountiful imaginings,
And all which beauty with it brings
To purge and populate, and fire,
And make immortal man's desire?
Now tell me not that I do tell,
In this, a psalmody of hell.
I do but speak a speech of old,
When simple breath was simple-souled;
And life a floweret 'neath the sun,
To ope and blow till day be done;
And i' the golden air of East
Were theme of song, both man and beast.
I do but preach what I would be,
Were at my feet that azure sea;
And at my back the fumèd crest,
Crowning Sicilian pleasures blest,
Black breath of Erebus unfurled,
Reminder of an underworld.
I do but tell what I should think,
Did columned shrine show by the brink
Of yonder cliff, so white and sheer;
And from yon grove did straight appear,
Rose-wreathed, the throng of them who bear
To her, Love's Queen, her richest share
Of worship and of winning hymn,

Of tripping step and kneeling limb;
The tribute of a trust demure
In her, beneficent and pure,
Who taught of joy, and did it fix
The gifted charge, Love Genetrix;
Nor to that other would incline,
Astarte of the libertine:
Such was their faith, and such is mine.'

So said I, gazing where she hied;
Nor would my worship be denied
While sight and thought were thus imbued:
Then, mindful, I my way renewed.

Yet came an hour,—nor was it long —
We met again, but in the throng
Of nightfall and the flaring rays
Of shop and street, the rumoured ways
Of pressing foot, and clattering heel,
Of thundering hoof and rumbling wheel.
Thus met our sight; but mine was now
Such as no fancy did allow:
I saw that shape's seducing grace,
The dallying step and dainty pace,
The poisèd head, the pert appeal
To all that could the spirit steal,
And lodge it in the stricken grip
Of passion's spellbound wardership,—
I saw them pass; but not again
I turned me i' the track of men
To conjure adorations wild
For thing so fearsome and defiled;
Which now, for me, not if I would,

Was aught but blight of womanhood,
So branded in the garish ray
The shallow temptress on her way.
O light of morn! how had it graced
This form with virtue white and chaste,
And with its sweetness all dispelled
The gagging truth, whence speech had welled,
That spinster of the tricky fold,
Enwrapping what she may not mould,
Or cozening unto shape divine
Circeian faculties of swine!
O light of night! I could have cried
Thy sordid pity ere espied
That thing no more for me but one
Among a multitude undone;
To be the butt, and battered foil
Of blessings else whose bliss would spoil,
In absence of the sadder chance
Which doth sweet happiness enhance.
I knew her but for such a blot
As work of man has aye begot;
The lying tone, the vapid hue,
The one false lineament he drew,
The carver, when his chisel slipped;
The poet, when his purpose tripped,
And in the wonder of his song
Did set a rhyme all sick and wrong,
That who shall read will speed it o'er,
As dead stuff that can never soar,
And leave it to be read no more.

Ah, me! 'twas so — I sped her by.
But what of that? and what am I?

A RHYME OF THE RIVER

I flowed for ages by the brink
Of sedge and marsh, the thicket-hill;
On my broad face the day did blink,
The myriad rays that nightime fill.

With purl and eddy was I fain
To rid the water from the land:
In service of the dropping rain,
My food I drew on either hand.

And but the drake, in plumèd pride,
Did urge his glib way mid his kind;
The gull did cry, the heron bide,
And watch the wave with earnest mind.

And all was silence with the morn,
And silence with the ebbing day,
Save for the ripple by the bourne,
That rush of air the reeds obey.

How then he came, I know not, first,
A naked thing, and threw his net;
And o'er my way, with daring durst,
A wicker keel, in cunning, set.

And gathered ever of the good
I bore him, both with flush and flow;
And fenced him for a brotherhood
Of give and take, of come and go:

Till wattle-wall to brick and stone

Did change, with stir of other blood;
And, bank to bank, a way was thrown,
And mine unmade a parting flood!

Since then I know myself no more;
My tide may freshen as it will,
The grey gull fly, but fro' the shore
The din of strife, the murk of ill:

With shadows black of bridge and quay,
Of pier and pinnacle, and dome;
The gable-craft, for man to be
The more a vaunt, the less a home.

And braced am I, and bridled in
By tracks a many, mean and great;
And 'thwart of me its way would win,
All eager greed, from morn till late.

And I am but a soilèd use
In service of man's grosser need.
He knows I may no more refuse
My rider, mine, than bitted steed:

And calls me by a kindly name,
That mocks me through the filthy moil,
By him beset, and cries a shame
On that brave thing he still would spoil.

But well I know a time shall come —
Let Earth but wait, and Earth shall see —

When he shall pay the perfect sum
Of his unpriced iniquity.

Yon sun shall burst his bonds of East,
And spy the city, where it lay;
And all its desolation feast
The sweet of undishonoured day;

Where mouldered block, moss-gathered stone,
And foundered brick, together lie;
And ne'er a footstep sad and lone
To break the stillness far and nigh.

And by the slimed and stainèd rest
Of wharf and arch, and butting pier,
My sea-swept course is swiftly pressed,
My tide returns, and without fear

That ever in the æons long,
While waters fall and rivers run,
Earth-womb shall bear a second wrong,
As did it bear this perished one:

And man shall be a name no more,
And all his work pass out of sight:
And I shall flow 'twixt shore and shore,
And day be day, and night be night!

THE THINKER'S PLAINT

O happy he whose labour all
Is craft of finger and of limb!
The mart, the workshop, and the stall,
Not they, the fate complete of him.
But he shall draw, some bonny day,
A breath, exultant of escape,
No pensive care need stop or stay,
By wood or stream, in any shape.

While vacant easement never now
To wracking thought and wrangle mine;
But I must force from Heaven how,
Or Earth, its tangle of design:
And I must bear the troubled charge
Of judgement, wheresoe'er I be;
Though skies are wide, and winds at large,
Their freedom ne'er may set me free.

THE WOLF-BOY

His skin was foul, and foul his hair;
On mouth and hands the reek of food:
He lay beside them in the lair.
Best of the wolf-born brotherhood.

And through the woods he ran as fleet,
And flung to earth the frighted hind;
And shared the raven of their meat,
And glared the fury of their mind.

He took not credit for his shape;
Nor wondered much why that should be;
Nor e'en that he were nearer ape
Than wolf, to them, a mystery.

He reckoned birthright with their own,
Nor ever guessed a stranger bond:
Good comity of blood and bone,
And all the world was foe beyond.

Yet on a day thiswise it fell,
He held a pebble in his hand,
Stream-polished, and he viewed it well;
Its red-veined tracery he scanned:

When, sudden, to his lips there sprang
A hasty cry, and to his feet
He started, and the drowsy gang
Of glutted comrades ran to greet.

And, one by one, he tendered straight
The pictured stone to stony eyes!
And strange to him what did await
His proffered joy, in anywise.

For not a gleam responsive broke
In wonder at the marvel wrought;
That image clear no note awoke,
The chance delineament was nought.

A wasted work was that which drew
Blind Nature, in some artist hour;
A wolfish form, with touches few,

No less with tool of double power.

The snout, the fang, the lolling tongue,
The pricked ear, and the rabid eye,
No startled sight that gang among,
Not one acclaimed them:—'This is I!'

'Twas then he stared, and staggered back,
And put his fingers to his brow;
And found of faculty a lack,
A wondering 'why', a fiighted'how',

And through his frame a shudder ran,
And through his brain did pass,afloat,
A thought of what ne'er clutch he can,
It is too slender and remote.

At most a sigh does give it speech,
A sounding of the hurried heart,
As somewhat would the spirit teach
That puts him from his lot apart.

A moment, and the flame is fanned
Of human zest, the spell of men;
The next, that stone falls from his hand;
And back, a wolf, he goes again.

THE THIEF

When saw they many a one
Of things by others done

Were rendered once again
By his more perfect pen;
Then did they mutter much,-- in brief,
They cried him for a cunning thief.

As did they never deem
Thought to be but a stream
Which widens into fame
From streams of lesser name,
And takes its great way to the sea,
Accused not of dishonesty.

Since what else should it do
Than draw to life anew,
With broader, deeper, pace,
The tributary race,
Who would not, in their own despite,
Dispute so serviceable a right;

And hold their waters back,
As of outlet were there lack
Toward the better air
Of Ocean fresh and fair:
O not in possible belief
Be't theirs to call that other, thief!

WHERE SILENCE WAS

What if I watch thee for this hour beset,
O Love! with all lip-follies that beget
The babbling affectations of the vain

And emulous world — O what if once again
Be mine to stand a moment, and apart
From all this fascination of fine art
In wit and jest that would an answer seek
More lively from those eyes and from that cheek;
Ay, from the speaking gesture of that shape,
That breast too pure that I should bid it drape,
And leave thee unto them whom beauty spares
Thus much of that I know not ever theirs?—
What if? what if? — not of a jealous soul,
As some would say, I, silent, hither stole;
But for the hunger of my love to know
Thee yet the one who once awhile did go
Where silence was,—ah, now I see thee so!

That summer eve! how well be my recall
Of goodly things about that goodly Hall,
Ancestral home, to which, with welcome pressed
That day I came, a sad and stranger guest;
And now betook me, scarce my greeting o'er,
For that brief hour of freedom yet before
My wayward wish, again without, alone;
And thanked the tender daylight yet unflown.
How gracious, there, in lawn and bush, and flower,
And mighty trees, with umbrage to embower
Seclusion's self, and walks that thither led!—
That one by which my pensive way was sped,
It passed, as I remember, where there stood
The dial, and o'er its wisdom would I brood,
Though shadows all were lengthening with the West,
Whose flush was red-reflected o'er the breast
Of yonder lakelet, whither then I went,
To catch, more nigh, its mystery intent.

I came adown where greening rushes grew,
Where through the watery sod a trickle drew,
Cress-laden; and, athwart, a footing spare
Of plank and baluster my step did bear
To better path, high-banked above the marge;
And mine at length to tread along at large.
But never so! — for, there, upon that way,
Beside which wrinkled elms did reach and splay
A dark and sun-dried leafage, there I saw
One other could alike in silence draw
A scene with meditation so imbued,
For clutch of thought elsewhere in vain pursued.
Toward me she came, with dreamful pace and slow;
But of my presence noway did she know,
So fixèd alway were her eyes aside
Upon that sheet of shimmering waters wide;
With ever froward boughs about her hair
Of midnight gloss, and to their kisses bare:
Till nigh to me for whispering she stood
At length, and then no more of motion could
Those feet impose against that fettered gaze,
And stillness all was hers, and with the day's!

How o'er the farthest ambit of the mere
Then did arise one ripple-fleck, and near
And nearer widened to the waking touch
Of drowsy water-weeds, with ever such
A whimper as of faint and passing things
O'er whom the sleep of peace its shadow wings;
And all again was silence! — though, methought,
From yonder reedy distance yet I caught
One bird-cry brief, as were the ruddy breast
Of water too entrancing yet for rest:

Such rest as did alike our trouble take,
That tremble of twin souls anigh to make
Encounter, and be blest, and strangely dread
Lest something–what, they know not–them be fled.
We stood apart: no need to nearer draw,
Obedient both to that divining law,
Whereby the wordless colloquy of sense
And feeling, like possessed, and like intense,
Knows no relief, nor interest, in speech
Where all is unison and each in each.
We stood apart: I watched thee with these eyes;
And thus I have thee ever,— though defies,
Awhile that high remembrance, this assent
Of thine to vainer moments,— and be bent,
Here, as I stand again aside, my view
Far from this crowded room, and fashion's due,
To where red waters, girt with reed and tree,
At eve outlay, from breath or freckle free;
Where silence was, and silent so were we!

NOW! NOW!

But once again, Beloved, ah, that word,
The while those lips are motive to their use!
It comes upon mine ear as music heard
In some exalted silence, to refuse
Alike, again, its exquisite avail:
Just such another note must ever fail.

But once again that touch upon this brow,
The while that hand is tender of the soul!

'Tis such a moment, this, as could enow
Immortalize the clay, and shape it whole,
With one deft, subtle, stroke, to living grace
Which craft must seek in vain e'er to outplace.

But once again the earnest of that look
While can no vagrant,other,thought invade!
'Tis such an insight as the singer took
When he bespoke that theme his honour made;
And i' the long run of the years to be
Alway no vision so fine did he see.

IN MEMORY

STAND they again, these feet, where that sad day
they stood;
Here, on this silent spot, unchanged with changing years;
As o'er the dim between once more to brood,
And through this haze of tears?

Here, where the naked stone to thy name still is
true;
Red is the ripest fruit on yonder rowan tree;
The turf is strewn and sear, though rich in hue
Yet would the gay plots be.

And parted only by the melancholy shade
Of cypress ever mute, as ever gaunt and grim,
The blank memorials stand, or low are laid
'Neath some green,weeping,limb.

Even as, none otherwise, in the far long ago
Speechless, we turned aside and left thee there to
lie,
For none thy voice to raise, thy face to know,
In the long by and by.

Even as — ah, can it be that I nought have availed—
Brother, that I am here unused as yet to bear
Thy harness of the soul, which then I quailed,
As now, too oft to wear!—

That through the shirking course of my unmeaning
youth,
All to the creeping reach of this too early grey,
As then, unlike to thee, I leave the truth,
Be what its yea or nay:

So that upon the shifting wings of fickle thought
Mine be to vaguely flutter in the sunlit span;
So that to some new bloom my path be brought,
Sip whensoe'er I can;

Unmindful ever of the immanent reproof
Of this still sod of thine, its lone and silent suit;
Whence, what appeal might be for my behoof,
Turned not my trivial route.

And thou art one more of the good dead unredeem-
ed
In heirship of the soul's superlative desire,
As though thy beacon light had never beamed,
Thy speech, a perished fire:

When but one brand alone had this uncertain touch
Clutched and affixed above mine ill-illumined way;
Though not my search persistent overmuch,
And ofttime the delay;

I might have charged these years of unassured design,
Shamed with all little issues, vain — as vainly wrought—
With that best solace of thy sad life, thine,
Sweet philosophic thought.

I might have thewed me for the questionings of fate,
Solving with eager heart man's most besetting theme;
Earning immortal gratitude, the gait,
The brow of Academe;

To thy regard and honour. For whensoever some,
Pointing their reverence of a truth by me outlaid,
Had cried:—'This was his work'—from me had come
This answer:—'Wrongly said'

'Mine but to love and cultivate the thing that grew
From seed an earlier, other, hand than mine had sprung;
The wiser skill of one ye never knew,
Whose praise lies yet unsung:

Lies yet with him who 'neath the unhonoured calm
Of leaf-strewn, grassy, sod, beside one rowan tree,
No foot of friend now nears; but ever balm
In that good thought of me!

UNUTTERED YET

SOMEWHERE the thought is mine—the thing is true!–
Be when it will delivered,—unto guise
All unforeseen, and broached in manner new—

Of birth assured: when to these searching eyes
Shall tenderest accident of hill and stream,
Green mead, and ruddy tilth, belike arise;

Or some low, russet, roof shall well beseem
The darkling hedge-row shelter of high boughs;
Or setting light on deep-eaved lattice gleam;

Or woods be full: when to this ear allows
The marshalled silence of close-gathered shade
No break to dreamful peace, when would it drowse;

And in the hush and aspect of breath stayed,
And held in meditation mute and pure,
Then be creative call at length obeyed,

And out of inmost thinking mine to lure,
Then — then — that answer to my long appeal,
Enlocked in soul's possession ever sure;

Though for its better and perfected weal
Yet must it, nurturing in the brain, endure
Till mine to speak, and men, like me, to feel.

THE DREAMER

Upon his hand he drops his brow,
There, sitting in that sordid place,
Where he had drudged long years enow,
To feed the pale blood of his face;
To feed her life-blood, paler still,
Whose thought with him must ever fill:—

The mother frail, who sits and sighs
His absence from the home so mean;
Whose patience with the long day dies;
Could she through brick and space have seen
Her son, how bowed his weary head,
Hot tears from her sad eyes had sped.

And now the desk, all dabbed of ink,
Does know the slow breath of his sleep,
As through the grey pane would there blink
A sallow ray, and on him peep:
And all is still; when opens wide
The door,—the master steps inside.

His look is kindlier than its wont.
Amazed, the started slumberer hears
These friendlier words:—'Good fellow, don't
Think I see not how labour blears
Thy better health:—see, here I hold
A little gift of counted gold.'

'Take it,—'tis thine! go forth awhile,
And shake the hardship from thy soul
Of this dead haunt, this durance vile;

Forget my face, thy daily dole
Of pen and desk, as ne'er yet did
Thy life so long of these be rid.'

'Go forth—away—for week on week,
Till to thy strength good colour comes:
In fresher air thy pleasure seek,
And fling the trouble that benumbs
Thy perished health; accept, and be
The happier man returned to me!'

The thing is said. The door is closed
Again behind the speaker's voice.
He is alone, who ne'er supposed,
In sweetest dreams, a chance so choice.
His ears scarce trust what they were told,
Save for the sure sight of that gold.

He is alone once more: and now
He staggers back upon his stool.
His hand goes swiftly to his brow,
As if to keep his senses cool.
While, in a flash, there passeth o'er
His soul the things that lie before:

When, with the morrow's sun, shall wake
His eyes upon another day
Than e'er was his; and they shall take
Their own dear peace, and pass away,
Hand within hand, that happy pair,
For sight of things long thought too fair.

She, whom the dismal street alone

The thick breath of the narrow way,
The murk of morn had ever known,
The sick fall of a shortened day:
Whose eyes the sweetness of the green,
Th'aerial blue, scarce e'er had seen.

He, whom the drudging desk apart
From human bliss had ever held;
Within whose sad and cabined heart
No richer chance had ever welled
Than, true, to drive unwearied pen
Upon the score of other men:

These now were two, their way to go
Where'er, awhile, their will agreed;
And to the fair winds they would throw
The carking past,—from which befreed,
Some good of earth, at their behest,
Should proffered be, and of the best.

His arm should lead her by the path
Where waves the red wheat, thickly sown,
Or where strong summer swells the math
Again of meads aforetime mown:
And Autumn tips with bronze the briar,
First promise of her later fire:

Or where the orchard gathers weight,
And droops its ripe limbs to the grass;
And, while the herd swings wide the gate,
The hounded flock, all huddled, pass
To where the upland sward is sweet,
And prospects broad good eyes do greet:

Or where the good kine slowly wend
Their way free from the milkmaid's hand:
The ploughboy speaks, and they do spend,
His team, their will upon the land:
And blessing all, for man and beast,
On honest earth is rich-increased:

Or where— but, ah! the thought is all
Too full of what their eyes shall reap.
He will not now too clearly call
Their presence, lest he make it cheap,
With too much hugging to the mind
That plenitude of pleasures kind.

Such things shall be. Enough, that grace,
Now his, to quit that sordid spot:
For him to pass from out that place,
Done, for awhile, his dreary lot,
To homeward hasten, press a kiss,
Ere he does utter all their bliss;

Ere in her eyes, so wan and grey,
Which wonder at his wild embrace,
He lights that first, forerunner-ray
That shall illumine soon her face
With such a smile, as never through
The darkling past he ever knew:

With such a cry—! but, ah! no more!—
It wakes him from the vision sweet.
And now his dream is done and o'er
At tread of too familiar feet.
He stirs,-he shifts upon his seat;

His dazed look turns toward yon door,
Where soon his eyes two others meet,
A lip, a brow, same as before;
And not in hand, and not in hold,
Is any gift of counted gold.

'WITH A SLEEP'

Go softly, feet: have care lest she awake!
Hold back that lamp, lest flashing upon lid,
So sweetly fringed, it flinch, and be upslid;
And eyes so blue
Full-gazing cognisance do give and take!

So—so: sleep on! Stand will I here awhile,
And watch those red lips parted by slow breath;
And watch this semblance of the fairest death,
This stilling view
Of childhood more than ever without guile:

Of innocence in dreams, as pure and white
As is that pillow rayed with her gold-hair;
If dreams they be which but a moment bear
Winged memories swift
Of gladsome hours of laughter and of light:

When danced and sang, and leapt beneath the sun,
And caught at all beams of fantastic thought,—
Through dappled leaves by summer æther brought
In winning drift—
This life, here, now, to such a silence won!

Then what shall be this ceasing of the flesh,
So far before the grave its charge hath claimed?
O tongue! by thee how shall the death be named,
To which so nigh
Is resurrection there, and love afresh?

Since well I know 'tis mine but to give sound,
So slight, to this my presence, and incline
To reach of that embrace, and arms shall twine
My neck; and I,
Have I not, too, the full of life refound?

Ah! passing strange! Yet not so should I deem,
Perchance, this evidence of what would be
That bountiful arousing, when shall we
Cast back a look
At this our dwelling, likewise set in dream:

When as one nighttime was the span of days
To each allotted;—then for her, no less,
When, waking, she doth spring, our lips we press,
'Twere as she took
But of her slumber a more feeling phase:

And is possessed of but a better spell
Of visionary discernment, bodied out
Beyond the present aspect of a doubt;
Whence she will hold
Ne'er more of actuality befell

A girl who with the glistening of the dew
On herb and bloom, fresh with the morrow's call,
Shall laugh as one whose faith is naught at all

In wonder told
By me, whose years would ever deeper view;—

By me, who would not alway touch and take
In earnest these, the blotted deeds of earth;
But would ascribe them to their proper worth,
Slow to unfold
For eyesight, mine, that is not yet awake.

INSPIRATION

So when they saw with what a touch
Of ease he shaped that thing, supreme,
'Twas theirs to marvel overmuch,
And half-divine they did him deem;

And caught the whispering in his ear
Of forms and voices, not of earth;
And spoke his praise, as of a seer
Who got elsewhere his gifted worth.

Then softly would he smile within
His inner self, and call to mind
The hardy past, when yet to win
That place above the common kind:

How, with the peep of chilly dawn,
Frowned on his thought the garret roof;
How for the ribald eve his scorn,
From cup and board he held aloof;

And caught at every fitting cue,
And put his seal on every sign
And taught his strength its fullest due,
And gave his soul its right divine.

A DIAMOND-DIGGER

THEN got he to his feet, clutching it tight,
That glinting bit of stone-embodied light
The dull clay-earth so long had held in store
Against the day his pick should turn it o'er;
And, staggering to the level of the land
From out the pit, he pressed a knuckled hand,
Firm-shut, upon his brow some moments mute,
Ere looked again on his long labour's fruit.
It was too good an end to such despair:
Some seconds yet without it would he spare,
And fancy that it were thing still unfound,
For greater joy when, see,—without a sound,
E'en of the breath, he opes that folded palm;
And there, of all past ill, the little balm!

Nought but a pebble-bit; yet thousandfold
Its own fine weight should win of yellow gold.
Gold! gold! that gate of comfort and of love!
Ay, with whose ease comes goodness from above;
Kindly capacity for other's want;
That sweetness of which shelter is the font;
The superflux of peace from one who ne'er
Out of wolf-eyes of hunger has to stare:
For which how had he yearned! 'Ah fate! ah, fate!

Why came this gift so grudgingly and late?'
Thus cried he, turning there his sight around
On all the loathèd labour of that ground,
Tumbled and trenched with ever barren sweat,
That scarce did even life's bare pittance get.
Why had so many shifts of night and day,
Of sun and moon o'er skyline far away,—
Where spent the hideous levels of the plain,
And, in relief, came back the gaze again
To labour of the spade — why, for so long
Had ill-luck wrung and wracked his spirit strong?
Ah! what a while was there! how oft had fled
Hope from his soul, and left it all but dead,
When, flinging work aside, upon some mound,
Or quarried edge, of that detested ground,
'T was his to sit, an earth-stained thing of woe,
And let despairful hours uncounted go
In empty misery, scarce raising sight
When passed that way some jesting fellows light,
And jeered him of his chance, as well they knew
His was a plot where chances were but few:
There sit, unmoved, unthinking, chin on breast,
Until the day went down upon the West:
And but the dank of night's death-smitten chill
Brought back the soul's sufficiency of will
To rise, and crawling under cover mean,
To thrust a sickened food his lips between:
Then silence and drear sleep, and with the sun
Another day of delving was begun.
Ah, God! but what a round! O why — O why
That wretched length ere this thing caught his eye?

'Twas but a flash of thought in which he put

The question fierce, and with a passionate foot
Kicked scorn upon the sod by him upturned:
The next, his better self such query spurned,
To which was answer broad-writ on his soul,
Telling why good is ill which pays no toll,—
Tax of the spirit's best in wrong and pain,
Of courage against which all shock were vain,
Of constancy strong-armed for all assault,
Of labour that runs longwise far a-fault,
Turning for years the waste and barren lot,
That so in aftertime be not forgot,
Through heady misconceiting of the mind,
The good price God must fix on any find
Which comfort gives; but also giveth love,
The gate of ease, and "goodness from above;
Kindly capacity for other's want;
That sweetness of which shelter is the font."
Such were not his, if, with that envied chance
Of others, luck had met his earliest glance;
And ne'er, in deprivation brooding, he
Had so its holier uses learnt to see,
Fledging each prayer for audience with a claim
So far above the creature's greedy shame,
As now, recorded of angelic hand,
For ever must beside his honour stand,
And bind him to the last. Ah, true! ah, true!
Not loathed, but loved, this work within his view,
This trenched and tumbled earth: thereto he bends
On suppliant knees and humble: praise he sends
Somewhere aloft, and here his trouble ends.

BY THE WATERSIDE

Sit we where running waters wile
Still hours away; and let them lave
Thy feet with mine; and but a smile,
A pressure of the hand, I crave:

Then care not I for man, nor knave,
For fashions fine, ambitions vile.
I know no hope, none other, save
To dream with thee thus, Sweet, awhile!

THE PYRE

Put boughs upo' my chilly corse,
Above, below,— let no remorse
Of feeling spare the kindling fire
That lifts me to my long desire
Of living elsewhere than with so
Dull flesh I would no longer know.

Put branches o' the sodden earth,
And whatsoe'er of little worth
Has fallen low with autumn winds:
Myself was such: but now the minds
Of ages hail me to their lot.
Immortal time I too have got!

IN PARTING

FAREWELL! farewell! but never look thy last!—
Nor yet will I, that no time we may know
How, each from each, we be for ever passed,
And take our lone ways, as two streamlets go

With winding passage through the green champaign,
Twin-minded on sweet mission to the South;
And never tell when drawn to parted main
In East or West by mighty river mouth:

Henceforth ne'er sighted of the same fresh morn,
Nor shadowed of the like declining eve;
But glad no moment knew when they were borne
Apart, and spared them the sad taking leave:

That which were best:—upon opposing way
Till Ocean hath them. Ah! that one embrace
Of infinite possession! Say — O say
Is such a unity a thing of grace?

Alas! I cannot think it. 'Twere a woe,
Worser than this, to own thee but in all.
Nay; let us part, if part we must; but go—
Go, softly silent,—go beyond recall!

SPEAK! SPEAK!

SPEAK! speak! if it be thou thy very self!
Stand not so mute upon this silent hour,

As fearing to awake these senses, wide,
To thy clear shape, and from this bed I spring,
And snatch thee, be thou spirit, to these arms!

Speak! speak! I am obedient to thy rule.
I know I may not hold thee as of yore:
The good of earth is past, and gracious hours,
They are but as the memories of the air
Drawn to the brain by some sweet, sad, perfume.
Yet would I know the mission of thy love
In other terms than those too tender eyes,
Than in the soul-lit glow of those dear cheeks,
The ever speechless parting of those lips.

Say, then, O say, Beloved, —if 'tis thou
Who knowest the very threadwork of my mind,
And what it hath of hidden—say one word,
One little word all privy to the bond
Betwixt us twain when we went side by side,
That shall be seal and signet to this grace
Bestowed on me, in mercy of our God:
One little word, and I will ask no more;
But henceforth will we parley with our look,
Using such speech as the seraphic loves,
In accord with the ever-circling spheres,
Emit in endless harmonies of thought!

Ah! but I hear not ever that dear voice!
Passeth again this night as those foregone;
And I must sink back to the pillowed dark,
Bed-fellowed still with all black unbelief,
Which hugs me to the white and chilling day,
For worser unfaith yet? O can it be

Thou art empowered to presentation such,
Of verity compact, in lip and brow,
In languor of the eyelash and the fall,
True, rendering of the spirit of those eyes,
The fall about thine ears of that sweet hair,
The very course and carriage of the throat,
The pitch and build of head and neck and arm,—
Ay, even the veiled emplacement of those breasts—
Yet may not of thy dispensation pose,
And order of thy tongue, the lesser task,
Whereby warm breath is moulded into words?
Or might it be—ah, dearest, then, declare!—
Thus much art thou withheld, lest be revealed
By thine angelic speech some blessed hint
Of that divinest future which awaits
Our present grief; to which too well this hand
Were tempted to deliver me, untimed
In God's more wise discernment and decree?
If so, believe me, thou,—if ever voice
Of mine for thee was all of honour's note—
I swear upon the value of that vast
Eternity of bliss, I will endure,
Endure this lone life to the withered end,
Wilt thou but utter now with those dear lips,
Which ope and shut – I see them -- to no use,
One word, one little word —ah! go not! no!
What! have I wronged thee to another flight?
Importunate desire! O wherefore — why
Wilt thou not hold? She passeth into dark:
I am alone! and never more may be
E'en chance of silence, O my love, with thee!

THE UNFAILING

When all was over, of hope an end,
Kind fortune fled for ever:
When word was there none that could ease or mend,
No plea, though sad as never:
And the face of fate were a thing too cold
For a cheer, how brief and fleeting;
'Twas then he went forth where the woods were old,
And green the fields with greeting.

And the sun and the wind were in fellowship sweet
O'er the red grain, thick and waving;
Where the brooklet ran o'er the footway, fleet,
And he smiled at her lightsome laving.
And the bramble spread o'er the bankside brown,
While the blackening fruit grew mellow;
With nothing alive to look, blameful, down
On a poor and pitiful fellow.

With never a finger, a nod of scorn,
Or voice, how light-deriding;
Nor offered a hint of the shame to be borne
For the rest of breath's abiding:
But abroad on the Earth the true tender of love
That her breast hath ever in keeping:
O there, in her peace, did he pace yet above,
Where, below, be yet better his sleeping!

DOLOROSA

How still it lies, the little thing,
The little life that once was mine,
So short ago, its hands to fling,
Its arms about my neck to twine,
At mother-love to clutch and cling!

How still it lies!— ah! can it be,
A moment's pausing of the breath,
And I am here for misery;
And that is there, a bit of death,
And gone is all felicity

With one, my own!— tho' faith may say
The babes beyond do trip and grow,
And round our feet in pleasure play,
And kiss our grief,—so let them go—
Of that I noway, nothing, know.

I am alone — and that is there—
And I may kneel beside this cot,
And reach and touch; but to despair
No voice — no answer to be got
From that which is, and yet is not!

SIMULACRA DEI

A cowering thing, but half-erect,
Half-man, he glanced about the cave
Wherein the red West glamour gave,

The last rays of the day were flecked.

And, crouching low, with drowsy nod,
Did shudder at the forms of night
Oncoming, and with shrinking sight,
With reverent dread, did call them God.

Then he, the hunter wild and free
Upon the Ocean of the plain,
That sun which sinks, to come again,
Must sure for him Earth's monarch be:

Hailing his consort i' the moon,
Who back o'er yonder barren crest
Steals-up her silver vision blest,
A second and a gentler boon.

So he who stays the labouring hoe,
The spade, and leans him for awhile
Where, wide, the good sod green doth smile,
Should he another Presence know

Than is in that broad, flashing, stream
Whose bosom swells with yearly flood,
And bears the fallow, saving, mud,
Else would the land a desert seem.

And they within the narrow frame
Of one inwalled, embattled, state;
'Twere strong and apt if they did rate
That cincture with the Sacred Name:

And set its imaged splendour high

Above their citadel of trust;
And fling their thanks from blood and dust,
From where the foe did shattered lie.

When, with the peace their valour wrought,
Grave men of meditation, they
Arose, and to a wiser day
Declared another God was brought:

Whose substance was, in cause, the One,
The First, the Infinite, defined
Alone of philosophic mind:
All lesser worship were undone.

To whom as much of sage reproof
Came with the growth of feeling years;
And conscience, creeps, and judgement nears,
And right no more may rest aloof:

And in the justice of the scales,
The sword upborne, did man acclaim
The Hand of recompense or blame,
The Throne ripe wisdom ever hails:

Till that a Voice,—and 'twas a tone
Far-off and sorrowful, and sweet,
But heard of all — and did it greet
Strangely the ear, that truth unknown—

A Voice outspoke; though scarce a word,
At first, of so meek message, new,
Was caught, e'en by the ready few,
As by the many who demurred.

Yet, slowly, with a hearkening long,
And wonder of the started eyes,
For dullest soul there grew surmise
Of what to scorn were heady wrong:

Till with mute gazing far above,
From whence that utterance seemed to float,
Broke, in the end, from every throat,
The echoing cry, 'Our God is Love!'

DIRGE

Carry me out through the old creaky door:
Thrust it awide to the sun.
Carry me out where I'll walk never more:
Lay me down light when ye've done.

Lay me down low by the red-berried yew:
Bare me the head to the shade.
Stand by the brown earth out-tumbled anew:
Slowly therein see me laid.

Scatter a handful and offer a prayer:
Move ye away with the morn.
Carry me back for a thought: never there
Leave me forgotten and gone!

THE HARVEST MOON

Ah! look how yonder through the silvern air
The stubble blinks; the sickle hath laid bare
Its bristling symmetry; the fertile stooks
Are numerable at pleasure; whoso looks
Beyond yon byre, yon moss-roofed barn, shall spy
Where shortly should good grain in-gathered lie,
Close-thatched through winter storms. Broad oaks, high elms,
Boldly do stay the light that overwhelms
And dares the dark to hide the goodly wealth
By man and beast begot in blessed health.
The upland gleams against the northern sky,
And i' the coppice could the watchful eye
Decipher tones and lustres of thick leaves
Bronzing apace: yon splendid orb believes
Herself of faculty to stir the flow
Of youth anew, what though the seasons go,
And sleep is near.....But we—O we, awake,
Dear Love, will saunter forth upon the pure
And perfect air: that form should well endure
Its tender touch, so cloaked against the cold,
With guarding arm about thee, and I fold
Thee near to take the floodlight and the feel
Of that suffusing fullness, which doth steal
On whoso views this largess of clear love,
Discerning, shed from yon lamp up above,—
As 'twere, for us alone—for us, a pair
Of those whose pace would aye be debonair,
A gliding dance.....Ah, now, dear heart, we pass
Our feet, scarce heard, upon the kindly grass,
Dew-cool, where drowse the sheep, the spider's loom

Spins white, and springs in silence the mushroom,
For morning hours! Ah, now! ah, now we know
The invisible realities below,
Through which we lovers walk, tho' garish day
Would have it we do tread the common way.
We see ourselves alike embodied, both,
To presentation of some better troth
Than Earth deserves; we move as through the veil
Of nature's shroud, our wonder to regale
With that futurity of faith elect
That hath no grave, whence some day resurrect.
Now — now transfiguration of the frame
Of man and maid to substance of the same
Immortal mould: we glide beneath the light
Of yon delicious sphere to that aright
Was ours alway; though no time did we dare,
Before, to formulate the vision fair
In words, as these.— O Moon! thy gathering in,
Thy grace, for us doth true delight begin!

GREY DAYS

Then let the sun be churlish, if he will:
O Friend, we have within us that endowed
With light which can a landskip larger fill!

Lift up those eyes, that head so heavy-bowed:
Rain-clouds are grey, hold back their dropping
charge:
Then let them lower; the soul they cannot shroud.

Are we not gifted with the winds at large
To pass beyond the purlieus of near view,
Fleck seas afar, lone creek, and palmy marge;

And fruited vales, back from the murmuring blue
Of Ocean, and rich uprise to the snows
Of sleeping peaks, someday to smoke anew;

And clad the land where bloom incarnate blows,
Green leaves are glossed, or silvern is the shade,
With ashen heat from Earth, her mother-throes:

Broad summer isles, with light abiding rayed—?
O there, past sombre imposition, vain,
Of this grey pall, be gladsome vision stayed,

Teaching the arrant faculties of bane
And blight, and dour things, brutish, and imbued
With ignorance and gloom, how little pain

Be theirs to fix on souls in vigour mewed
And fledged for sovran altitudes, and flight
O'er fate and time, and nigh things narrow-viewed:

And all the cramping circuit of drear sight
Us round about, that chills the quivering flesh,
And stills the hand that would of bliss indite

To touch inert. To 'scape so gross a mesh,
O will is ours; and strength to give it right,
And purpose, to transfigure it afresh

In form and phrase! Ah! words wilt thou requite!

I see those eyes at length uplifted; far,
Brave,things therein, O Friend, reflected are!

DO ME RIGHT

Do me right, as you did before:
Lover am I; but a troubler,too.
Throw me reproof,should I dare to adore
Ever the like of you.

Lawns are wide where you walk at large;
Cedar and beech, and the evergreen bay:
Step and pier by the lilied marge,
Pond where the waters play.

Plot is mine but of blackened earth,
Meanly shadowed and bound about:
Streets are foul; of all peace a dearth,
Thick with the rabble rout.

Greyed are these eyes with the skyward gloom:
Blued are yours deeper in æther fair:
For me no forgetting of ways that doom,
Long-laid 'twixt here and there.

So do me right, as you did before:
Toiler am I, and a poor one,too.
Learn me quick to love never more,
Never the like of you.

THE UNDERWAY

WHAT if are we so worn with many labours
About the good brown earth, the clearing, seeding,
The fostering, the reaping, and the bearing
To croft and barn; the tilth-work and the tendance
On fleece and udder, and the bleating spring-time,
The folding i' the fall;—what if we may not
Beyond these things have outlook, or surmising
Of your exalted senses that supremely
In voice and speech have utterance, and do teach you
To draw from life its loftiest aspirations,
And trouble death with mysteries immortal,
And play with fate;—O, none the less, we deem not
Ourselves so poor who do the underway walk,
So nigh the sod, we know not what it were to
Conceive of good not there forever rooted.
We plod with morn; the labour of the daylong
Hath sun and air in serviceable plenty,
And hungered hours, and comfort of the healthful,
Redundant blood,—to eve, the sweet possessing
Of leisured self, once more the home-returning.
We sweat and live, and love where it beseems us,
In honest guise, two labourers i' the likeness
Of fertile earth, the troth of man and maiden
Beyond, or if you will, beneath, the phrasing
Of flatteries vain, and raptures never rightful.
And i' the creeping incapacitations
Of aging days we go not with the painful
Perception, yours, of failing, the descending
To levels low; since ours alway the plain path
Beneath the hills and summits; scarce we measure
Or mark the slow declining. We are laden

With no regrets: the sun is o'er the furrowed
And laboured land: O thereupon our part we
Once readier took; but ne'ertheless we know not,
While eyes are wide, therefrom that separation,
I gather, yours, Great Sirs, when you discover
Your good illusions spent; and you do foot it
With us, as humbly; when is naught before ye
But meat and sleep, and manhood to remember.

CONFIRMATION

Come to me with the creeping on of eve,
And eyes long watchful of the flickering hearth;
And tell again how fondly did bereave
Vain death, and bid thee hastily to leave
Our double path!

Come to me with the glimmering of the stars,
Unclouded, through the leaf-framed lattice dark;
And make again oblivion of the bars,
The thick wall of the flesh, that ever mars
When would I hark!

But come—O come more surely with the lift
Of veiling night to dawn's prophetic stir,
That I may draw from thee possessive gift,
And with the day be firm, nor flit adrift,
What hap occur!

THE FAILURE

His word did nowise better fare
Than were it vibrate not in air;
The will of speech devoid of breath,
On some dead planet's plain of death:
Or as his voice did pitch a note
That was of timbre too remote,
Of accent too strange and intense,
Beyond the scale of common sense.
And thus it seemed that he had failed,
E'en to himself, when naught availed
His message to awake reply,
Or bring a beam to any eye;
But lay a cumbrous thing effaced
From other's thought, as any waste.
Then he arose, and with a smile,
Forlornly sweet, did for awhile
Walk bowed and blank-eyed to and fro,
Far from the fretful come and go;
And said again the things he felt,
Though not in verbal fashion spelt,
But as by contact of the soul
(Whereby is told of truth the whole)
To barren hills and ragged skies
Whose no response gave no surprise;
To marsh and mere whose chilly dearth
Was but the indifference of earth;
To stocks and stones, and landskip grey,
Dull sufferers of the stormwind, they;
When winter kills with drip and frost,
And lingering leaves to death are tossed.
And 'twas his way not much to mind

His cloak about his breast to bind,
And thwart the reach of that despair
Which humoured well such nipping air;
And slowed the current of his thought,
And brought his purpose back to nought.
Whereby befell that on a day—
And one of many without ray
Of kindling sun—he lay at last
As stem from which the sap has passed,
With hapless essay, could it suit
To sickened air its leaf and fruit;
And yields and droops, and draws the eye
Of the first foolish passer by,
Who treads it to the sod, and so
What might have been here spread below,
Of beauty, none shall ever know.

THE TRAIN

How in this wilderness of hills
That so for æons lone hath lain,
At length, a sound the silence fills!—
It is the rumour of the train.

They travel to and fro, the folk
Of other mind than you or I:
Theirs be the world:—be we awoke
But for a moment where we lie.

WORSHIP

Be thine the way,–mine only to pursue:
Be thine the wish,–my will as eager,too.
Set thy strong hand upon the neck of earth,
And these weak arms shall urge the giant-girth:
Or raise thy high voice to the hearkening stars;
This fingered lip shall note none other mars.
The conjured deep should labour at thy call,
And mine to prize its bounties over all,
Setting an orizon on every wind
That would inbear the freightage of thy mind.
What thy thought doth attain, for me, shall seem
The form and end of every lesser theme.
What would thy feeling fathom, ne'er shall plumb
My deeper speech, or be mine ever dumb.
And what thy fancy summoneth, aflame,
With infinite volition,–never name
Another flight; but I will follow,sure:
Thy feet I feel — I mount me! but endure
Our twin ascent to airs invigorate, high
Beyond the tell of earth, and ne'er shall die
Thy light uplifted; nor should ever know
The kneeling nations how 'twere fixèd so:
I am no less of them who bow below!

OF LITTLE FAITH

What! though a sparrow fall, shall He,then,never,
This God of ours, o'erlook the little chance!
What! if a worm be trodden, should it ever

Be yet a part, if lesser, of His glance!
And should a word so tender this enhance,
My solace,—me from desolation sever!

Dear friend, of thee I take it, in reminding.
'Tis as thy wont to offer all thine own
Of precious trove, and prizèd in the finding;
Pearls of sweet promise none so thickly strewn,
As by thy bounty should be freely thrown
Before the gaze of one is evil blinding.

When seems it fitter to this hour of grieving,
When all is gone, that somewhile would He sleep,
And leave to sin and wrong the deed bereaving,
That thereby past His pity they should creep;
In blood and tears earth-raiment ever steep,
And strain to uttermost our weak believing:

For me, my fate! And since, of faith, the Giver
Would thus, a moment, see me all forlorn,
Let be the blasphemy: not thine to shiver
At one of blessing by the Blesser shorn:
Let be the flood that bears me; I am borne
With arms aloft, and death, His death, the river!

THE SIGH

I'LL crave no thunder from the cloud
To fright him with the sense of wrong;
Nor arm and voice uplift, aloud
Demanding succour of the strong.

But I will heave one little sigh;
And he shall wonder what it be:
Yet ne'er shall know till that he die,
And sigh the like, and after me.

UNCHANGED

SWEETHEART I see thee not with beauty seared,
The wrinkled ill of time's disfiguring touch;
But thine, for me, be still that trait endeared,
As ever such
To longing thought of youth and love appeared.

For me, no cloak, nor greyness of decline,
Can, shrouding, hide thy soul's dear shape eterne,
Whose light within–my lamp–shall ever shine,
Must ever burn,
And bear me forth, and bring me faith divine!

CLOSE O' THE YEAR

ONCE more the days grow nakeder, the waning,
Slow, journeywork of earth stills to deservèd,
Chill, withered, sleep; the weeping and the winddrift
Fallow the sod, and cloak the muffled footfall;
While thro' the woodland shows a widening skyline
Beyond black shafts and bare: the mindful birdfolk
Do flit and chirp more nimbly with the rousing,
Forerunner airs that whine upon the dead wold,

And trespass i' the copses and the thickets
Before their bitter time: the lawns and orchards
By light feet are abandoned, and the pleasaunces,
Hedged and high-walled, are joyed not with the trailing
Of rustling robes; the swan upon the waters,
Among the shivering reeds, the sunken lilies,
Goes mournful, glides his lone way to no purpose,
By none approached.
Sometime we will o'erwatch, here
Leaning beneath the lych-gate, that sad acre
Which is of God: and view the goodly yew trees,
Red-fruited, wear their calm green, and persistent
Against the world without, the wan and mortal,
Where do they walk, grey creatures of foreboding,
That, i' the end, i' their shade do repose them:
And view the mosses old on wall and headstone,
And buttress hoar, renew their gloss, rejoicing
In the pallid light of suns too brief, afar off
In southern skies, for verdure not assignèd
To the kindly use of covering and of cloaking.
Close o' the year! the will of life outwearied
In twig and blade; the finishing, and the silence
Of deed o'erdone, if futile, too remotely
Purposed and planned for them to query wherefore
Who have obeyed but impulse of the bloodflow,
Or red or white, the creeping and the tingle
Of strange desire to rise above the cold earth,
A shape of grace, to fruitage and fulfilment.
Close o' the year! though one be't or a hundred,
'Tis but a term: the ceasing and the stillness
Comes i' the last; the falling and the farewell
Begs no redress, but droops unto the dead sod,

As dead itself, and cares for no regarding,
Nor shamed of vain delight too long uplifted.
There let them lie! 'tis well if death be restful
Oblivion for the most part: we whose wasting
Hath consequence of sorrow ere they carve us
A slumber in the turf, there, yet uncumbered
With graven stone,—could we, without repining,
Sear thus to sleep, a little sadly, slowly,
But without word of unfaith or reluctance,
The vanity of tears, or voices rueful
With doubt and disputation,—could we wither
So blissfully to winter and the passing
Beyond the bourne, O, one, as I, could welcome
These days so drear with friendship, and would
take them
More tenderly to heart than now I dare to,
Who see them teach man too-too good an ending,
So spurred his soul to frenzied aspirations,
And worser fears, he may not fade as they do,
Lay by his bones, the brown earth but above them!

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